

SUMMER 2015

home design real estate



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Bloom, Build, Bask

Next visits an arthral Burlington SMS and yearns to play all day in a Kollington tree house. In Fairfield we geek out over willows with horticulturist Michael Godge, and get our craft on making citronella candles, because mosquitoes

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ON THE COVER

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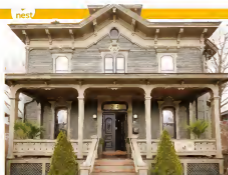
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REAL ESTATE VT



Room in the INN

A Burlington B&B artfully mixes old and new

BY RACHEL ELIZABETH JONES



A regal Victorian facade and twin gargyle-like door knockers greet guests at Made INN Vermont, but the imposing exterior only hints at what awaits inside. Since proprietress Linda Wolf opened the eclectic bed-and-breakfast in August 2012, it's become a notable destination for Queen City visitors seeking both elegance and funk.

"We consider this entire run a work of art," Wolf says, leading a reporter through the giant, refurbished house on South Willard Street. The B&B, Wolf notes, was originally the idea of her daughter, Brooklyn-based artist and jewelry designer Shelly Voorhees. The two worked together realizing their vision to reality, beginning with their purchase of the building in 2006.

Built in 1878 as the residence of a granite excavator, the house retains many of its original features, from carved entryways and landings, thick banisters to paneling and wooden floors. According to Wolf, a madison who once stayed there alleged that the mansion has also retained the ghostly presence of the excavator's wife, Elizabeth. "I've not personally met her," Wolf says wryly.

As the inn's name suggests, an abundance of local finds are woven into its expert decor. An industrial 1930s light fixture from Coarse Metal & Light illuminates the entryway, and unique claw-foot tubs were salvaged from the RESOURCE Building Material Store. Wolf proudly points out a "fabulously beautiful" original bathroom set, sourced from the Anchorage Salvage Warehouse in Foster Junction. Several of the inn's attornies were upholstered with fabric from Johnson Woolen Mills.

Made INN to start on South Willard Street, looking into the inn's common space



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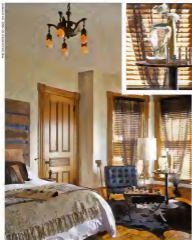


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Room in the INN 403

Visitors may find themselves drawn into the common space as if by magnetic pull; the room is a virtual treasure trove. A revamped Queen Anne-style table with a concrete-fill top offers a broad selection of coffee-table books, as does the built-in library opposite. In fact, art- and design-themed books and magazines are plentiful throughout the entire house.

"I seem to have a collecting thing," Wolf admits. "I see so much potential in everything I pick up."

The treasures she employs to decor include vintage globes, a Pleuguin-esque portable light switch that works as if by magic, ceramic dolls and foam wig forms. Original artwork includes a tabletop figurative sculpture by Voorhees and many splatky, gestural paintings by LA and Montreal painter David Hinesbach.

The large common area gives way to a cozy kitchen fully stocked with goodies, including special Vermont treats such as Heady Topper and Pico Burger for adult guests. The kitchen's back door opens onto an enclosed patio and hot tub.

The building's second story houses the inn's four high-ceilinged guest

rooms, each with its own character and charm. A private bathroom is down the hall. Guests in Room 904 can take in the colorful sprawl of past guests on the chalkboard wall, perhaps while seated in the Rames chair. Each room has its own terrace as well. Room 904 is artfully "ruled" with Alchemist caskets.

Compassing up the carved staircase past the living quarters is the master's enclosed window's switch, set atop the no less a cherry. With a million-dollar view of downtown and Lake Champlain, the small enclosure is equipped with chairs, a tabletop checkers setup, telescope and binoculars—should a guest care to bird-watch or get their Ruse Window on.

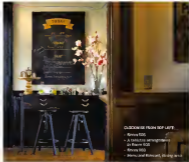
"We're very relaxed, we're very authentic, we have a youthful design—we're very Burlington," says Wolf.

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Need for Speed



How does broadband access affect real estate property values?

BY KEN PICARD

Meg Streeter of Wilmington is a lifelong Vermonter and real estate agent who works predominantly in Windham County's residential market. After 32 years in the business, she has a pretty good idea of what it takes to sell a home in her area. These days, that includes high-speed internet service.

"In the last five to eight years, it's become a must-have," says Streeter, whose territory includes Wilmington and Dover, where 90 percent of the real estate transactions involve vacation homes bought by out-of-state residents. "It's the one person who's coming here to get away from it all," she adds. "They don't really want to be that away from it all."

Just about five years ago, many home appraisals and building inspections didn't even mention internet connectivity, says Jane Chivers, CEO of Vermont Realtors, the 1,700-member real estate trade organization.

Today, Realtors routinely use a form called the Seller's Property Information Report. The one-page document asks sellers to disclose virtually every feature of the property, from the number of bathrooms and bedrooms to the type of foundation, roof, septic system and appliances. It also includes a "telepresence" section that asks whether internet service is available on the premises and, if so, what kind: dial-up, broadband, cable, satellite and/or DSL. That info gets entered on the broker's multiple listing system, or MLS, so buyers can weed out houses that lack the features they want.

Chivers says it's common for prospective buyers to tell their agent they're looking for, say, a three-bedroom home in Newport in the \$250,000 to \$300,000 price range, but for the agent to only show them houses with broadband access. If a house doesn't have it, he says, the buyers never see it.

"Anecdotally, I hear all the time that people pass up houses [without broadband availability]," he says, "but I don't have any way to quantify that."

Vermonters have long benefited the digital divide that separates residents of the state's more populated areas — notably, Chittenden County, where broadband coverage is widely available from

multiple providers — from their more remote counterparts. Those in the real estate business say that, depending on a property's location, broadband access can make or break the deal. Though Streeter can't put a dollar figure on the value of high-speed internet, she says, "Basically, if the house doesn't have it, in my opinion, it's unlikely to sell."

Streeter isn't alone in that observation. Rep. Laura Filkins (D-West Dover) represents the towns of Dover, Windham, Randolph, Starksboro, Seaburg, Sumner and part of Waterbury. A review of the Vermont Department of Public Service's most current statewide map of broadband availability, released in April, reveals that in much of Filkins's southern Vermont district is stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide.

VIA, the Springfield-based telecom company that received a \$5 million state grant in 2012 to provide wireless broadband to underserved areas in Bennington, Rutland, Windham and Windsor counties, has yet to deliver on that promise, Filkins says.

Consider Randolph, she goes on, located along the Massachusetts border. It was once a thriving community that housed workers from a local chair factory, the Yankee Row nuclear power

plant and Westfield Paper Company's glassine factory just across the state line. When all three employers closed in the 1980s and '90s, some 300 to 400 jobs disappeared.

Sibilia readily acknowledges that the lack of broadband in Randolph isn't the only obstacle to economic recovery. But its absence makes it even more difficult to attract home buyers and new businesses.

"Kids can't do their homework, because the service has not been built up from the school," she says. "People are literally abandoning their homes that have been on the market for years and they can't sell."

HIGHER-END HOMES CAN BE MORE CHALLENGING TO SELL IF THEY HAVE BOTH POOR INTERNET AND SPOTTY CELLPHONE COVERAGE.

LAURA SIBILIA

The Federal Communications Commission now defines broadband as Internet speeds of at least 4 megabits per second (Mbps) downstream and 1 Mbps upstream — 4/1 for short.

According to Jan Porter, director of telecommunications and connectivity at the Department of Public Service of the 104,000 addresses in Vermont, 71 percent have access to broadband speeds of 25.5 or higher. "Frankly, broadband is more important to people today than voice service," he says.

To date, no one has analyzed the relationship between Vermont real estate prices and broadband. Anecdotally, however, the differences are obvious to those who handle real estate deals in areas where one community has access and a neighboring one does not.

Sibilia cites the example of Windham, which abuts two six-acre Stratton Mountain and Mount Snow. It should have a bustling market for vacation homes. However, the combination of poor cellular coverage and low Internet availability along Route 100 has made it difficult for people to sell houses there. Meanwhile, just nine miles away in Dorset, a community that invested heavily both in broadband and cellular infrastructure, the real estate market is firing much better.

Chance points out that real estate values are determined by a variety of factors, and other considerations can trump lack of broadband. A good example, he says, is Washington County, where the strength of the real estate market is due to the number of state workers who want to live there. Still, many homes outside of downtown Montpelier and Ferris have poor Internet service.

Chavez discovered as much himself when he moved to Vermont from New Mexico four years ago. He says he was shocked to find that his internet speeds were terrible in East Montpelier, where he had purchased a house.

"I don't even bother to try to work at home anymore. I just drive to the office," he says. "Luckily, I'm only seven minutes away."

According to Chavez, one common variable in the price point of the home itself. If it's a home in the \$300,000 to \$1 million range or, say, Manchester or Stowe, it's likely that the sellers have invested "whatever it takes" to get high-speed internet. Sellers who haven't done that are most likely to run into trouble with \$300,000 to \$400,000 homes between Newport and Jay Peak in the middle of nowhere. "Though rural buyers typically don't expect lightning-fast internet connections, higher-end homes can be challenging to sell if they have both poor internet and spotty cellphone coverage. (According to Porter, 55 percent of Americans now access the internet through mobile devices.)"

"That's an even worse selling point than the broadband," Chavez asserts. "There are places that you just can't get a cellphone signal, and that can be a serious deal killer, because potential buyers see it as a safety issue." For her part, Stewart hasn't had clients whose homes sat unsold for years because they couldn't pass the "Netflix test," i.e., streaming a movie online without constant buffering. But she does know of someone who had a house for sale off the grid in the Green Mountain National Forest, with no likelihood of ever having electricity, cable or wired internet.

"Their house was half a mile from the north face of Mount Snow," she says. "These people had the fastest cell and [internet] service. It was amazing! That's how I sold it!"

Contact: ken@vermontpost.com

INFO

To review the latest statewide map of broadband coverage, visit publicservice.vermont.gov/vernet/vernet.html.

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Clean & Green

Vermont Soap has a formula for cleaning homes the nontoxic way

BY BEN PICARD

The curing room in Vermont Soap's manufacturing facility in Middlebury may be one of the most fragrant spots in Vermont. As dozens of soap bars cure on drying racks like aging craft cheeses, the air is laden with the rich aromas of pine, peppermint, lavender, lemongrass and other essential oils.

But, unlike the scents added to most conventionally produced soaps, shampoos, lotions and home-cleaning products, none of these odors comes from artificial chemicals or toxic ingredients. In fact, the earthy midrich hue of some of the bars is derived from lobster shells.

Vermont Soap, whose unofficial slogan is "Replacing packy stuff with juicy stuff," specializes in formulating natural, organic and nontoxic home and garden products. These include uniform deodorants, crab-care products, antiaging creams, pet and horse shampoos, surface cleaners, fruit and vegetable washes, car cleaners, and even pop-rust cleaners. Most are U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified

organic, and all are safe and nontoxic. That makes them ideal for consumers with severe allergies or chemical sensitivities, or those who simply have concerns about the prevalence of hazardous materials in the home.

Larry Picard, 57, founded Vermont Soap in 1992, after he'd learned the hard way what toxic chemicals can do to your body. In the 1980s, Picard earned money for college working as a Burlington window washer. In an effort to economize, he contacted his own window-washing solution consisting of dish detergent, four cloves, windshield-wiper fluid and antifreeze.

For about eight years, Picard routinely washed himself in noxious chemicals such as sodium lauryl sulfate,

methanol and ethylene glycol, which left him with severe contact dermatitis and multiple chemical sensitivities. Conventional deodorants gave him rashes; acrylic hair sprays and aerosols that lasted for weeks. Normal shampoos caused his hair to fall out.

He tried one conventional brand after another, but the problems never went away. By 1991, Picard's "toxic body" was so sensitive, he couldn't touch or be around artificial scents, artificial colors or petrochemical products, including most plastics.

Then, one day at a Vermont craft fair, Picard picked up a bar of soap made with goat's milk. Just days after he tried it, his eight-year bout of dermatitis disappeared. Reaching that count less other

consumers must suffer from similar sensitivities, Picard decided to turn his disability into a business venture. Thus Vermont Soap was born.

Of course, Vermont Soap isn't the only producer of eco-friendly home-cleaning and personal-care products in the Clean Mountain State. According to *Forbes* magazine, Burlington-based Seventh Generation does more than \$300 million in annual retail sales.

While Vermont Soap hasn't reached that level, it's growing quickly as more consumers seek products labeled organic. The company now has 28 employees and sales in excess of \$3 million annually; it recently expanded into Asia and is exploring new markets in Europe. Two-thirds of Vermont Soap's products

are now sold under other labels or are added as ingredients to other products.

A June 2005 fire in Vermont Soap's factory on Middlebury's Exchange Street shut down operations for four months but ultimately proved fortuitous. It forced a move into a manufacturing facility more than twice as large just down the road. The company will customers a discount retail outlet at its original location. There, consumers can find deals on

Vermont Soap products and visit its modest soap museum, which features antique washing machines, shaving kits, classic toiletries and, of course, old soaps.

In accordance with Plesner's goal of "doing as little harm as possible," his new and much larger manufacturing space is all electric and at or near zero-emissions. Reheating landscaping that might expose his employees to pesticides and other allergens, he recently planted vegetable gardens for his staff's use.

Consumers who typically buy organic meats and produce can shop online at Vermont Soap for similarly nontoxic alternatives to familiar cleaning products. For example, Produce Magic is an organic cleaner that removes stains, pesticides, and other dirt and residues from fruits and vegetables. Green Car is an automotive cleaner similar to Armor All, except it's certified organic and contains no petrochemicals.

Liquid Sunshine is an all-purpose spray-and-wipe surface cleaner and concentrate similar to Citrus Sol, but it contains all-natural citrus oils. According to Plesner, it can be used safely on cabinets, woodwork and hardwood floors, just like Murphy's Oil Soap, but it's nontoxic and easy on your hands.

Steady Lincoln, owner of Family's Books & Bakery in Rochester, sells organic baked goods and uses the

uses only Liquid Sunshine on all her counter tops, glass surfaces, prep tables and dishes.

"So many chemicals on the market leave a chemical, toxic smell behind," she says. "Liquid Sunshine has a really clean aroma that our customers love."

In 2004, *Delicious Living* magazine gave Liquid Sunshine its Editor's Choice Award, noting that the household cleaner contains no volatile organic compounds, which can irritate eyes and cause headaches.

"Is it possible to live in love with a household cleaner?" wrote managing editor Jenna Blumenfeld. "If it's certified organic, eco-friendly and made with a more five ingredients, it is!"

Many of Vermont Soap's customers suffer from asthma or chemical sensitivities or have compromised immune systems due to chemotherapy and other medical conditions. Over the years, some have reached out to Plesner to seek his advice or thank him for the products he's created.

In response, Plesner published a free, downloadable 66-page book, *The Restive Body Handbook*, which instructs people with chemical sensitivities, asthma and other environmental triggers on how to become a "Silverback Holmes" to unravel the mysteries of your own body.

"One of the first comments I ever got on our website was from a woman who wrote, 'Thank goodness you wrote this, Larry. I thought I was the only one,'" he says. "So, you're not. There are millions of us."

Contact: hen@vermontsoap.com

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Branching Out

Horticulturist Michael Dodge has a thing for willows

BY CAROLYN SHAPIRO

You might think of willows as the weeping kind, with their cascading branches that fall to the ground. Or you might picture a pussy willow, with its kitten-paw buds soft to the touch and pretty to display. For the average person — and even many seasoned gardeners — the willow savvy stops there.

Not for Michael Dodge. The owner of Vermont Willow Nursery in Fairfield has about 300 different types of willow trees and shrubs on his property. Over a decade, Dodge has planted all but a few longtime natives there: human!

A professional horticulturist who studied at the famed Kew Gardens outside London, Dodge is perhaps the most knowledgeable willow man in New England. Growers and botanical gardeners nationwide know of him, and customers in nearly every state have bought his cuttings — starting at a minimum order of 10 for \$25. This spring alone, the nursery filled nearly 500 orders.

"The education of all my horticultural training has ended up with willows," Dodge says. "I was able to focus on a plant that I've discovered very few people knew anything about."

Self-reliant at age 74, Dodge strolls through his nursery, ticking off both the common and scientific names of each willow and pointing out noteworthy features. Goat willow, usually found in Europe and Asia, has leaves that start out golden in color and tails of flowers that resemble caterpillars. *Salix cordata*, with sage-green leaves, is native to Vermont. Another willow with yellowish stems grew from cuttings Dodge took from a tree along Interstate 89. He

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has a big effect but willow — used to make, yes, cricket bats in England.

The diversity of the trees fascinates Dodge. "I could spend the rest of my life [collecting them], and I wouldn't do more than scratch the surface," he says.

Willows are in the Salix genus — part of the Salicaceae family of plants — which includes more than 450 native species and more than 1,000 cultivated varieties and hybrids. Some willows stand tall and lucky and many in the breeze. Others squat close to the ground, their leaves a dusty gray-green. Red-barked willow has twisted trunks that turn red in summer. The leaves of the woody willow — or *Salix laevis*, one of Dodge's favorites — look like little clusters of needles. Schreiner's willow seems to sparkle as its leaves, with silver-white undersides, rustle in the wind.

Dodge loves to discover new willows and track down rarely seen ones. In 2013, he led a small expedition up Mount Adams in New Hampshire to see a native species that stands just an inch tall.

Yulia Krasovskaya, associate professor of ornamental horticulture and a willow expert at the University of Connecticut, joined that trip. She says Dodge, who had collected her a few years earlier to discuss a willow issue, has an impressive level of experience and connections with willow growers across the country.

"Plus, he's extremely enthusiastic about willows," Krasovskaya adds. "His enthusiasm has given him so much information."

Dodge grew up in the Lake Blumet of England and trained helping his mother in the garden at an early age. In 1964, after training at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, he boarded the Queen Mary I and sailed to the United States to take a job at the New York Botanical Garden. Later, he spent his seasons at White Flower Farm in Litchfield, Conn., working as a horticultural photographer and gardener.

Dodge and his wife, Susan, a real estate agent, moved to Vermont in late 2005, after she was diagnosed with breast cancer, to live closer to her daughter, he says. (Susan is now in remission.) They found a tasteful, black-shingled 1850 house at the end of a dirt road, perched on nearly 50 acres of rolling hillsides and fringed by large maple trees. He and Susan headed a 6½-hill with shrubs and perennials they had planted in Connecticut and drove north.

The previous owners of their property kept lots of animals, which enriched the soil, Dodge notes. Vermont's notorious richness prevents digging more than three or four feet deep, but

the constant flow of water down the slope and along the rock renders the soil moist and loamy, he says.

That and Dodge's green thumb have helped to turn his property into a place lover's paradise. A bright-yellow swath of *Salix alba* brightens the hill in springtime. In a low spot behind the house, he created a blue space crisscrossed with rocks and lined it with hosts, peonies and iris. Asparagus and gerbil spread in a



THE MORE I LEARNED ABOUT THEM, THE MORE CHALLENGING IT WAS.

MICHAEL DODGE

vegetable garden in early spring. Nearby are raspberry, blueberry and blackberry bushes. Among the willows stand a cheam and elderberry tree, pear and plum trees, and dozens of apple trees.

Initially, Dodge paid little attention to willows in his 60-plus years as a horticulturist, though the trees are popular in England. In 2006, soon after moving to Vermont, he visited the Montreal Botanical Garden and saw a demonstration of living structures. It included a "Yelder" — a cross between a yew and a yelder — made with willow branches, or rods.

Strange yet bendable, willow rods are used for structures all over the world, including the Weissenhof (Willow Chapel) in Germany. That display got Dodge hooked on willows. "The usefulness of them," he says. "They're so flexible."

A few months later, while back in England to visit his mother, he stopped at several willow nurseries and met "the worst people" who grow to willows. Having returned to Vermont, Dodge bought his first cuttings of about 10 cuttings at a flower show; then placed a large order with a Kentucky dealer.

"I had no idea what I was doing at that point," Dodge says. "I just wanted more willows."

The plants cooperated. Dodge says you can stick any willow rod in the ground, and it will grow.

As he collected more and more willows and photographed them, friends suggested he put up a website and start a business, which he did in 2012. "We made 300 sales in that first year," Dodge marvels.

In the wide world of willows, this gardener soon discovered, many species and cultivars in nurseries and public gardens are unfortunately misnamed. Dodge immersed himself in research, studying the trees' characteristics and talking to experts everywhere. He has grown adept at finding and correcting willows with mistaken identities.

"The more I learned about them, the more challenging it was," he says.

Last year, he got embroiled in a big willow battle about the use of the wrong name for a group of popular Japanese pussy willows with red buds. Many nurseries were selling these willows under the label of a similar-looking but different species, Dodge explains.

This past April, Dodge helped Krasovskaya publish a paper with a New Garden Council, mulling the mystery of the misnamed pussy willow. Krasovskaya has a long list of other incorrect willow designations that she hopes to tackle with Dodge, she says.

"He has a good eye," she observes. "He is excellent in detection of the problem of species names."

Dodge has consulted with botanical gardens around the country to identify unnamed or improperly named willows. "There's a lot of him to be had doing investigative work into these names," he says.

A less enjoyable willow challenge is his battle against a pinkish-red, shiny black beetle that has infested Dodge's crop. The natural pesticides he has tried seem to work on some plants but not others.

Dodge also has to fend off disease and hungry rabbits. And now that he has expanded his nursery to a second plot in a low-lying area, he needs to find a way to divert the excess water.

Willow events demands much of his time and attention, Dodge concedes.

"It's a real sickness, once it gets into you," he says with a smile. "But, you know, I've never been happier in my entire life."

INFO

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nest House Hunt!

Following first-time buyers on the search for their dream homes

BY CAROLYN FOX

If you've been through the process, you know there's a learning curve, complete with near misses, drama and mystifying paperwork along the way. If you're starting to think about getting out of that rental and buying your own home, our House Hunters just might have some eye-opening tips for you.



CLOSING TIME: The McLellans Find Their Home

In the last issue of *Nest*, we introduced you to Sarah and Sam McLellan, two dartsman-things who'd recently moved to Burlington from Boston. Their house hunt started out in a less-than-ideal manner last fall but kicked into high gear by winter, when the couple learned they were expecting a baby boy.

At the end of January, the couple's offer on an old North End home — just under the asking price — was accepted, with a caveat: The owners wouldn't close until they found suitable housing, which left Sarah and Sam in the lurch with a baby due in July. Since staying in their rental apartment with a newborn wasn't a viable option, they continued to look at other homes while crossing their fingers that this one would work out in time.

Good news: After being under contract since January, the McLellans finally have a closing date on the original house — June 28. Or, as Sarah put it, "Two weeks before the new house comes!"

"Not necessarily being sure that this was going to happen was the hardest part," she reported. "We saw some other houses in the meantime, but it was hard to get behind an other house with this one waiting."

Not to mention the fact that more homes came on the market in springtime, and there was much more competition for them — which, Sarah said, meant bidding wars and higher

selling prices. "It was April, and it was just like, *hrrm!* The market is actually in existence," she recalled.

So after a very long process of just waiting and waiting, [finding the house] was such a relief," she said. They got the happy news just as Sam had started devising a backup plan to spend the summer in Boston with their families.

The house, at George Street, has three bedrooms, one bath, a front porch and a small backyard. "The house is so cute and little and perfect in its location," said Sarah, whose main priorities were walkability to downtown and resale value. (She and Sam expect to return to Boston in a few years.) "The fact that the [nearby Burlington Town Centre] mall is going to be reduced will probably be a good selling point in the future," she noted.

For now, though, they'll be making the place their own. "We're hoping to spread up the backyard," Sarah



As thanks for sharing their story with *Nest*, we're giving the McLellans a housewarming present, a four-hour home design consultation and \$100 gift certificate from *Stowe Kitchen Bath & Linens*.

explained, "maybe add a couple checkers and some raised beds." They plan to fence in the yard and do an energy audit, replacing all the windows and the front door before winter. And, since the house dates back to the 1840s, they're going to make sure local paint isn't an issue.

"It's all a little daunting right now," admitted the mom-to-be, so her parents will be coming to help them settle in —

"because," she joked, "family is best!"

Best of all, she and Sam will be able to give the new grandparents a place to stay over the summer as they all get to know the newest member of the family. Congrats, McLellans! 🐾

MOVING ON: James Q. Leaves Vermont

Nest's very first House Hunter, James Q. of Burlington, has finally moved — but not to where he'd planned.

The twenty-something health care IT consultant, who spent more than a year searching for a Burlington-area duplex, is leaving the Green Mountain State for greener pastures. In his case, that's central Massachusetts. He's started a new job there, and his girlfriend will be working and attending grad school.

"Our plan to stay in Vermont was thwarted by the low salary/high real estate prices," James wrote in an email. "The value metric of Burlington is heavily skewed. I saw a home in the North End last year go for \$344,000. It was on one-tenth of an acre, had no garage and was on a stone foundation... I know everybody plays the student loan card, but how are you supposed to save up for 5 percent of \$345,000, which equals \$17,000 and change, when you need to shell out \$400 to \$600 to make loan payments a month, per person?"

"We really didn't have a choice when we sat down and looked at the numbers," he continued. "Both of us love Vermont, and it was tough to leave so soon, but you kind of need to do what you need to do, you know?"

When asked if he felt he was sacrificing Vermont's much-coveted high quality of life, James countered, "There's plenty of nice places to live in New England." He's found that he can make more money in Massachusetts while maintaining the same price point and real estate experience. And in his new city, he reported wryly, "there's bike paths, lakes and even trees!" 🐾



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Backyard Tree House

BY MEGAN JAMES

Jason Mikula was obsessed. For one month in the summer of 2014, the father of two could think of little else besides finishing the tree house in his Kellington backyard. When his wife, Polly, asked him what he wanted to do after work each night that July, he'd reply incredulously, "What do you mean? I'm working on the tree house."

He had good reason to hustle. He was building the structure for his kids, Emory, 8, and Sara, 6, who live with their mother in Denver, Colo. He visits them regularly, but at the end of that month, they were coming to stay with him and Polly for the first time.

Jason knows carpentry basics, but he'd never built a tree house. He and Polly scouted through Pinterest for inspiration, and their first plan included a zip line and a hammock. They ordered a bunch of pressure-treated wood and got to work.

There were mishaps. They initially selected three trees to build the house in, only to discover, when one collapsed just days before they began construction, that all of them were dead. Jason

learned the hard way that it's foolish to attempt to hang a zip line by yourself (especially late at night, after a full year with your wife, when balancing on a wobbly ladder in the dark).

He also worried about the project's structural integrity. "I had nightmares that Sam was going to be in the hammock and this whole thing was going to fall down on him," Jason admits. "That's why we did bring in a professional just to look at it and tell us it wasn't going to fall over."

When the Mikulas pulled into their driveway on the first night of Emory and Sara's visit, "they jumped out of the car and ran up into [the tree house]," recalls Jason. "They were hanging on the zip line until 10 at night." ♥



Builder: Jason Mikula
Staymakers: Polly Mikula
Kids: Daughter Emory, 8, and son Sara, 6

Dwelling Deets

- The tree house includes climbing wall, zip line, hammock and basketball hoop for building lessons up and over the balcony.
- The project was a family effort. While Jason and Polly live in Denver to pick up the kids, it's his step and brother-in-law earned his carpentry license.
- Jason's parents helped a lot of the work and \$2,500 on the structure—worth every penny, he and Polly agree.
- Jason's parents donated a wooden bridge and covered the roof of the tree house with solar light panels, a basketball-shaped

table and chairs, and a zip-up climbing gloves.

- **Hint:** Built built built inside another hole in the yard, and still in the path through the woods that leads down to the basement.

This story or photo appeared in the June 2017 issue of *IN* at IN.

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No-Fly Zone

Repel mosquitoes with tiki torch candles

STORY AND PHOTO BY LAURIE PAULI

Longer days and warmer nights mean that outdoor dining season is finally here. Whether that means leisurely evenings on the patio feasting with family or friends, or just a moment of Zen with a cocktail and a sunset, we look for any excuse to stay outside during these precious few months of summer.

Unfortunately, mosquitoes are out there, too, and dank is peak time for them to be looking for their next meal. In other words, they're on the patio at the same time we are. Of course, you could pick up some commercial citronella candles. Or you could make your own.

Some minimal internet searching for do-it-yourself mosquito control led me to a wine bottle tiki torch. It's an inexpensive and straightforward project that promises to solve my bug problem and provide some warm, fiery light.



WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Empty, clean glass bottle—It doesn't have to be a wine bottle. You might use a pretty liquor bottle or something else with a narrow mouth.

Half-inch coupling—the little piece of hardware used to connect garden hoses. This helps to keep the wick in place.

Tiki torch replacement wick

Citronella torch fuel—This natural mosquito-repelling variety masks burning smell. It also confuses the bugs when they fly into the smoke.

Small pebbles or stones (optional)

Decorative rope (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

First, fill the bottle to about halfway with small stones if you have them. This reduces the amount of fuel you will need to fill the bottle. You can leave the outside of the bottle as is, or you can decorate it. I experimented with wrapping a thin piece of rope around the bottom portion of the bottle. The rope can be secured with wood glue or a hot glue gun.

Using a funnel—or a very steady hand—pour the citronella torch fuel into the wine bottle until it's about three-fourths full. Insert the coupling into the bottle and then insert your wick. Wait at least 10 minutes before lighting to ensure that the wick has become saturated with fuel.

Then sit back and enjoy your evening without those little flying friends. Use caution around children.

Laurie Pauli is an architect and interior designer in White River Junction. lauriepauli.com

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